

PRIMITIVE EUGENICS

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BEHIND the stories of a Golden Age and a Garden of Eden there is a biological truth. By his own act man banished himself from the life natural; he is now trying to find his way back again "carefully and with tears."

The life of savages to-day is rarely pure; it is generally contaminated by some Western influence, by the missionary no less than the whiskey dealer, but from it we can infer something of the life of primitive man. The age before history was not an age of gold, but neither was it an age of shoddy.

This life, so close to nature, so far from civilisation, exhibits several conditions which belong to Nature's eugenic system.

There is, first, the general environment, which need not be described, except by saying that the only drawback to its eugenic perfection is a certain irregularity about meals.

We shall consider here some primitive conditions which favour (1) the best unions, and (2) the best results for birth and for rearing.

Sexual selection among savages is a very interesting process.

Marriage is the rule; the idea of celibacy is as foreign to the savage as is the idea of libertinage. But though every man marries, it is the best men who win the best women. It is remarkable how high in physique and capacity the average is; there are very few degenerates or incompetents in a savage tribe. But the man's eye for a woman is very shrewd; and it will generally be found that the best man physically takes the best woman, the next best takes the next best, and so on. An old and influential man, the terms are almost synonymous, frequently accumulates young wives; at his death they are taken by younger men.

Courage and strength, dexterity and cunning of hand and

eye are the necessary qualifications of a bridegroom; the qualifications of the bride are, in the same way, her secondary sexual characters. Practically, he must be a *man*, she must be a *woman*, a "fine" woman, but a womanly woman, and possessed of "housekeeping" capacity.

The result is that the few "failures" in each sex pair, with very little chance of lowering the standard of the tribe.

This kind of "natural" selection is emphasised by what I have called "sexual tabu." Segregation of the sexes has a two-fold effect; it deepens the difference of secondary characters, and the psychical result is a deepening of the male preference for female, and the female preference for male, characters. Manliness and womanliness are raised to a higher power.

But this general form of selection is qualified by marriage law, the savage rules of kindred and affinity. I do not propose to introduce the thorny subject of exogamy or the only less thorny subject of the results of in-breeding, but I may safely mention some connected facts.

A general survey of human marriage shows the predominance of what is known as the "law of parity." According to this law the majority of persons are sexually attracted by similarity of characteristics, dark is attracted by dark, fair by fair, and so on. Now this preference is curiously encouraged by, or, more correctly, coincides partially with, a very common division of the tribe into two intermarrying sections. The nucleus of this bi-section is a pair of families the children of which are first cousins, and this relationship will be general throughout. A man must not marry in his own section, but he must marry in the other. The usual marriage, that is to say, is between cousins. It actually happens, of course, that there is only one set of first cousins, the children, that is, of a brother and a sister, not those of two brothers or of two sisters, who by hypothesis are in the same section. I omit various developments of the system.

The system is extremely simple, and the use of names makes its practice easy. We need not here inquire, though the subject possesses eugenic interest, why man originated bars to marriage at all, especially what may have been the first, namely, the prohibition of marriage between brother and sister. What is

interesting is that in the majority of natural communities in-breeding is the rule, but it is not allowed in the narrowest circle, uterine brothers and sisters.

Here we undoubtedly have an artificial method of fixing the type, and of preserving those variations which constitute and produced it. There is also a no less constant, though limited, proportion of crossing.

Such rules are in the form of tabus, and the term serves to introduce the second set of conditions, those namely which favour the best results for birth and rearing. The term also serves to describe the serious side of savage life. When we analyse the phenomena of tabu we find that it is a result of will, that is, of attention concentrated on physical crises. The emotions which follow such concentration are negligible, though some have attempted to derive tabu from them, putting a result before the cause. Such physical crises are pregnancy, birth, puberty and marriage.

The practical result of this concentration, which is expressed as tabu, is to surround those circumstances which are connected with the creation of a new generation with an armour of triple—respect. As compared with the sentimental variety prevalent in civilised life, this early form of respect deserves the style of scientific. It is the respect of the medical eugenicist rather than of the ethical or religious sentimentalist.

Those who have described some of the curious practices which are connected, for instance, with the establishment of the pubertal processes, have rarely penetrated beneath their curiosity. I will not describe these, but will merely emphasise their import and their result.

They help enormously, as one writer on the Maoris has put it, to preserve the fount of life from contamination and abuse. By emphasising isolation, when Nature demands it, and no less by emphasising union, as in the preparations for marriage, they keep a perfect balance between tumescence and detumescence, and their results.

In connection with this principle of natural regulation, may be mentioned the traces of a primitive pairing-season, and the well-established fact that so far from licentiousness being an

attribute of savage life, as was once supposed, the sexual life of savages is rigidly controlled both within and without. Its energy is normal and periodic. Not the least beneficial of these tabus is that which secures to the savage mother a period of some years for suckling a child, without the risk of having another. Again, such infanticide as occurs in savage societies is the result of forethought. Better, argues the savage, not rear a child at all, than "drag it up" under hopeless conditions, to be a weakly and degenerate specimen of the race.

One typical example of the results of these conditions may be cited, namely, the Fijians, who marry their cousins and have a well-developed system of sexual tabu. They are physically an extremely tall, well-built, healthy and competent race. The fact that such peoples do not survive when pitchforked into civilisation, so called, or when the blessings and the bacilli of the same are disseminated among them, is no argument that they are *unfit*. On the contrary they are fit, though, now, alas! but few. It may be that it is we who are both unfit, unfew. Men like the Maoris, Polynesians and Fijians are handicapped merely because they have not run the gauntlet of civilised squalor, misery, and disease for a thousand years or so. Consequently they are not immune even against measles, not to speak of other endemic fermentations, including industrial competition. Yet in health, physique and physical pride they are superior to all but our best specimens; their mental qualities are equal to ours—they only seem inferior because of that thousand years or so of training in the illegitimate use of analytical language, whose symbols are regarded as concrete realities and adequate *casus belli, theologorum vel politicorum*.

Meanwhile, we ourselves are becoming—what?—"A race of men, small, ill-formed, disease-stricken, hard to kill."

We have referred to the interesting way in which early societies kept the balance between in-breeding and crossing. That balance was kept by exogamy, which involves a considerable amount of cousin-marriage.

A development of exogamy, seen in Australia and known as the sub-phratry system, has another result, which it would be well if it could be applied to-day in Europe. Let us take the case of

the southern tribe of the Arunta. Instead of the familiar bisection of the tribe into two intermarrying sections, as in South and East Australia, we have four. Cross-cousin marriage is not forbidden, the only result of the change is that marriage is confined to the same generation. This is a codification of Nature's protest against the marriage of December and May. Even wealthy old savages have a pull over the youthful aspirants to matrimony; here is a law which does something to prevent their monopolising the young women.

It may have little importance for eugenics, but it has much for politics, that attempts should be made to reduce the friction so easily produced by the struggle for matrimony. In the system of four phratries, a man's choice is limited to a quarter of the women. In the Warramunga and Northern Arunta development of eight phratries, his choice is still further reduced to one-eighth. Each man knows where to look for a wife; the field is small, and fighting is much curtailed, with its danger to the tribal solidarity.

Lastly there is a detail which is unique in anthropology, and perhaps even in eugenic science. Some attempt is being made to supplement the researches of Huth and Sir George Darwin on the question of the deleterious nature or otherwise of cousin-marriage. They left the question undecided, but with a recommendation in favour of the harmlessness of such unions.

The Fijians were, at least up to the time, still recent, of Mr. Basil Thomson, a particularly fine race. Yet the majority of the tribes have practised cousin-marriage, as the usual form of marriage, for ages. So, we may add, have two other fine races, the Kafirs and the Jews.

Mr. Thomson was so much struck by the dual exogamy of the Fijians, and its result "of a race of men habitually marrying their first cousins," that he undertook a careful census and examination of the natives. The results obtained were checked by comparison with those provinces of Fiji where the practice did not prevail.

The main result of his enquiry was that the "concubitants" or rather "marriageables" (the native term for those following the dual exogamous system), were "in every respect the most

satisfactory marriage-class. We have here," he says, "a phenomenon probably unique in the whole range of anthropology—a people who for generations have married their first cousins and still continue to do so, and among whom the offspring of first cousins are not only more numerous but have greater vitality than the children of persons unrelated. Nay more, the children of concubitants—of first cousins whose parents were brother and sister"—(this, by the way, is the only first-cousin-marriage allowed by the dual exogamous system, to which it is the key, and is known as cross-cousin-marriage)—"have immense advantages over the children of first cousins who are the offspring of two brothers or two sisters respectively. In no other part of the world does there exist so favourable material for investigating the phenomena of in-breeding among human beings. Is it possible that we have stumbled upon an important truth in our physical nature? Is there really a wide physical difference between the relationship of cousins who are offspring of a brother and sister respectively and that of cousins whose parents respectively were two brothers or two sisters? Ought marriage in the one case to be allowed or even encouraged, and in the other case as rigidly forbidden as if it were incestuous?"

It is this latter detail that I referred to as unique; this apparent superiority of the offspring of a pair of cousins, children of a brother and of a sister. This kind of marriage is very common in early society all over the world. There are a few exceptions, for instance the Malagasy allow the children of brothers to marry, but not the children of sisters. Why, I do not guess.

It would be of immense interest if someone would undertake the examination of the question of cross-cousin-marriage.